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Wide-Swinging Bitter-Enders of the Right

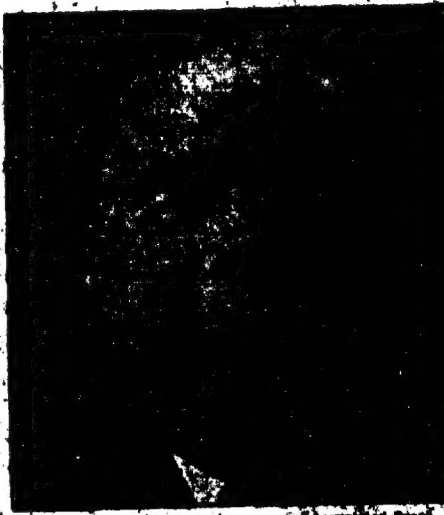
Everyone who has ever played crack-the-whip knows that a group movement must have its extreme—and that it always moves faster and more spectacularly than the main body. The present group movement toward conservatism in American political life has just such an extreme: The wide-swinging bitter-enders who call themselves the John Birch Society.

The John Birch Society is led by a man named Robert H.W. Welch Jr., a retired candy manufacturer in a town just outside of Boston, who has labeled President Eisenhower a Communist traitor. Yet Welch has enlisted as members of his so-called council some well-known names: Spruille Braden, longtime Assistant Secretary of State; Clarence M. Mason, former dean of the Notre Dame Law School; T. Coleman Andrews, once the nation's No. 1 tax collector. (The society opposes income tax—as Andrews himself now does.)

When the society came in for criticism last week, two Republican congressmen from California, Edgar Hiestand and John H. Rousselot, proudly claimed membership. "The society as a whole," said Hiestand, "is a 98 per cent dedicated anti-Communist group."

A Power in Politics. The John Birchers claim to have chapters in 34 states, but refuse to disclose their numbers—because, Hiestand says, members "might be subject to persecution and attack." (The society, on the other hand, admits to "mean and dirty" tactics to achieve its ends.) With yearly dues of \$24 for men and \$12 for women, the group is aiming for "100,000 members" in 1961. Modest as this seems, the society is becoming a political force in certain areas. In Louisiana and Mississippi, for example, it has infiltrated the leadership of the anti-integration forces (though it denies holding anti-Negro sentiments).

What the John Birchers do not deny, however, is a violent distaste for the social concerns of the nation's churches, the use of certain well-tried Communist



For his society, candymaker Welch . . .



. . . took the name of agent Birch

tactics (such as "front" groups) to achieve their goals, and an antipathy toward all the social and economic legislation of the past 30 years.

It was in Indianapolis, just over two years ago, that candymaker Robert Welch brought the society into being with a speech to a group of businessmen; the

speech has since been incorporated into the Bible Book of the John Birch Society.

About John Birch himself there is no real doubt. He was a heroic figure. He was a Baptist missionary who knew Chinese and spoke many of its languages. He served as a captain in the Fourteenth Air Force and then joined the OSS. It was in the latter capacity, as a U.S. agent, that he was killed by nominally friendly Chinese Communists (in 1945) on the railroad near Hsuehchow, ten days after the Japanese surrender.

The society that claims John Birch's name says that his death was covered up by "Communist agents" in the U.S. Government, among them the present intelligence head, Allen Dulles, and his late brother, John Foster. But no nation ever admits the death of an intelligence agent, which is what John Birch was.

Welch says he just happened to come across Birch's name while he was thumbing through some old Congressional records. "Up until a little more than a year ago," he writes in his biography of the young missionary-soldier, "I had never heard of John Birch . . . I was reading dry, typewritten pages . . . [his] name was brought up sharp . . .

Matter of Concern. In this obscure and casual way, John Birch became the symbol of a quasi-political society vociferous enough to disturb both Congress and the Department of Justice. There were cries in both houses of Congress last week for investigations—which Welch welcomes. Moreover, the group's activities were said to be "a matter of concern" to Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who has been aroused by the campaign, conducted chiefly through floods of letters to congressmen, to impeach Chief Justice Earl Warren.

Last weekend, calling for an investigation, the Republican New York Herald Tribune said: "The American people are entitled to know what the John Birch Society is up to . . . There are certainly better ways of combatting Communism [than by] a suicidal civil war of words."